



State Representative **Shay Schual-Berke** **2002 Session Report**

33rd District

February 2002

Dear Neighbor,

Each of us have been touched by our country's recent tragedy. The severe downturn in our local and national economies threatens us all. Money saved for retirement no longer seems sufficient, and money in the bank is no longer enough to pay for the rising costs of healthcare and other basic necessities. While the need for state assistance rises, our ability to pay for those services has fallen.

My last two newsletters were devoted entirely to two issues: the Budget and Transportation. Despite the need to balance our books, I pledge to do everything I can to preserve the quality of life we enjoy in the 33^d district. Your replies to my Transportation survey tell me that you want a solution to our gridlock. I look forward to working with Democrats and Republicans alike and am committed to finding a solution this session.

My job, as your representative, is more critical than ever as we face these tough economic times. We must make wise decisions in reducing our budget, and we must ensure that our families have the basics: affordable healthcare, quality education for our children, adequate transportation, and economic opportunity for all of us.

Inside this newsletter I will talk about my legislative priorities in addition to the budget. As always, I value and depend upon your input. State law allows me only one additional newsletter this session, and does not allow me to continue my electronic newsletter. However, I hope you will keep in touch. Please feel free to contact me or my legislative assistant, Allison Woody (woody_al@leg.wa.gov) by phone, fax, hotline or email to share your thoughts, ideas and concerns.

Warm regards,

Shay Schual-Berke

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Security Health Security = Community Security

The House Democratic Caucus has recently created a committee charged with the task of keeping our state safe. The newly formed Select Committee on Community Security will be responsible for assessing Washington State's capacity to prevent and respond to a terrorist attack. We will focus on state and local law enforcement agencies and emergency response teams.

I am serving on this committee because of my background and interest in public health. I will focus my efforts on the threat of bio-terrorism and the maintenance of our public health and emergency services infrastructure. Our public health system must be ready when we need it. Now is the time to prepare for bioterrorism and other stresses on our public health infrastructure — a system already weakened by years of neglect.



Education

Last year, our state Legislature passed the most comprehensive education budget in decades—and did so without raising taxes. Public schools will receive almost \$900 million more than the last budget and there will be over 3,500 new enrollments at state colleges and universities.

PROMISE SCHOLARSHIPS

Last session, we increased the number of Promise Scholarships to aid low and middle-income high-achieving high school seniors from around the state. More than 6,600 Washington students were eligible to receive these scholarships - equivalent to approximately two years tuition at state community or technical colleges.

"I have an enduring concern for the quality of public education. I am not on the Education Committee this year, but still remain a strong advocate for our children's schools."

— Representative
Shay Schual-Berke, M.D.

SAFE SCHOOLS

This year, we are committed to passing anti-harassment legislation for public school children. While we work to protect our nation's borders and cities, we must also pledge to stop malicious bullying and violence that torments nearly one in three middle and high school students.

SCHOOL LEVIES AND BONDS

I have heard from many constituents that they are concerned about the continued requirement that school bonds and levies require a super majority – 60% - to pass. I am sponsoring legislation to change that requirement to 51%. It shouldn't take more than a simple majority to pass the bonds that provide our kids with the quality education they deserve. We owe it to our children to change this requirement.

FUNDS FOR DRIVER'S EDUCATION

The State has markedly reduced available funds for Driver's Education programs, which schools may stop offering. My bill to slightly increase fees for Learner's Permits and first time Driver's Licenses can restore funding for Driver's Ed programs statewide.

Health Care

Although I am proud to have been the sponsor of our state's successful Patient's Bill of Rights, much more work remains to be done. A realistic legislative goal would be to build the best health care system within available resources. Despite the fact that health care spending has dramatically increased, our current system still doesn't deliver. Given the current economy, the state budget cannot support the tremendous rise in costs. In this climate, our state Legislature is presented with a compelling opportunity to reshape our system. It is time to start a community dialogue about how to best use our health care dollars.

Last year, I sponsored a bill that would have created a 13-member task force on healthcare reform. While it did not pass, the proposal has generated much interest. This year I will continue working to get it passed through the legislature.

In addition, this session I will continue focusing on:

- Leading a broad discussion of health system challenges and options for improvement
- Administrative simplification to eliminate costly and unnecessary bureaucratic regulations
- Affordable prescription drugs, so that people can afford and can get the prescription medicines their doctors prescribe
- Legislation to give our state more flexibility, coupled with strong protections – for use of our federal healthcare dollars – especially in caring for children and the elderly
- Encouraging our state agencies to coordinate and collaborate on healthcare issues



For further information on health care, I suggest the Kaiser Family Foundation website: www.kff.org. This is an excellent source of information on healthcare listed by state, and it includes national statistics.

Economic Opportunity

In taking a closer look at how government can collaborate with businesses to revitalize our economy, we need to focus on economic competitiveness. We must examine how businesses in Washington State are affected by transportation and utility infrastructure, as well as work to build a stronger, more competitive workforce. Today's economy is based on brainpower, not horsepower. Companies need smart, creative people and a way to get their goods to market.

An example of what we can do is the Washington Jobs Initiative, a program that would provide grants to local governments so that they can create local or regional programs designed to achieve livable wage jobs, promote worker retention and upward mobility for low-income job seekers.

These grants would be used to develop strategies that assist unemployed and underemployed residents obtain livable wages in targeted sectors, help low-income residents access job opportunities and coordinate public, private, and community services that provide outreach, recruitment, and job readiness services to low-income job seekers.

Programs like the Jobs Initiative demonstrate what we can do in this difficult economic climate.



Transportation

The I-5 corridor is the backbone of the 33rd district. Whether you use it to go to Seattle or Tacoma, we need a comprehensive transportation system (roads, transit, etc.) that serves our needs, not one that leaves us sitting in traffic.



The Governor's proposal, although it is only a starting point, includes several projects that will allow us to spend more time with our families and less time on the roads. These and other projects will significantly improve travel between Tacoma and Seattle.

We need to find a solution that works for the 33rd District and the entire state now.

Transportation Projects in Gov. Locke's proposal that would serve South King County

- Construct HOV lanes and a south-bound truck-climbing lane in the vicinity of Tukwila.
- New SR 509 Freeway
- Transit/Carpool direct ramp from the HOV lanes on southbound I-5 to westbound SR 518.
- Complete an HOV lane in each direction between 15th Street in Auburn and 84th Ave. S. in Kent.

2002 Session Preview

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Shay Schual-Berke

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